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A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR FIRST-YEAR SPANISH AND FRENCH: A COMPARISON

INTRODUCTION

The following notes, based upon actual classroom experience, are merely practical hints to fellow-*teachers*. They are very fragmentary suggestions, of course, but they can be enlarged at will. Any modifications will depend, above all, upon the previous linguistic training of the students. In our First-Year work, we were greatly aided by the fact that there were a number of pupils who had previously studied the second language (not then being taught to them as beginners), or who were still studying it. (Of course, the two foreign languages or any two should not be begun synchronously). The material submitted is taken bodily from L. Sinagnan, *A Foundation Course in Spanish*, Parts One and Two, i.e., Lessons 1 to 31, to page 138, of the complete *Course*, Macmillan.*

Even a rudimentary comparative study of Spanish and French will not only create and stimulate interest, but will keep it alive. We all know that interest in any work is basic as it is the father of effort and the mother of results. Hence we should take advantage of every means at our disposal to engender in our students enthusiasm based upon actual observation, and to keep it aglow. Furthermore, we live in the days of co-operation, and it is our duty as instructors of one subject to effect *direct* correlation with other subjects in the pupils' work, to utilize, and to connect with, their knowledge already acquired,—modest as our endeavors may be. I trust that this small contribution towards that end will be viewed in that light. It may help in opening up a new vista.

I. PRONUNCIATION

Spanish and French sounds have essentially the same basis of articulation so far as the energetic action of the organs of speech is concerned. The distinctness and monophthongal purity of vowels is to be noted here as being diametrically opposed to English speech. Again, if the students once have grasped the physiological justification of the so-called vowel triangle, it will be patent

*Ballard's *Beginners' French*, Scribner's, is a corresponding book for French.

to them that, e.g., *c* when followed by a vowel *a*, *o*, *u* must be velar, and should be frontal when followed by a light *i* or *e*. Observe that *h* is not a sound, a phonetic, glottal phenomenon, but merely a historically traditional letter.

We should point out that in connected utterance the *liaison*, so typical of fluent French, obtains also in spoken Spanish and forms a significant link in the long chain of similarities. The rhythmic-musical sentence melody, in both languages, is likewise noteworthy and may be regarded as a clear manifestation of temperamentally allied races.

Concerning the teaching of the difficult French pronunciation, I am unreservedly in favor of the use of phonetic notation by means of the symbols of the Association Phonétique Internationale, at the very beginning of the course. Actual experimentation in the classroom has demonstrated to us that such a procedure is in the long run a time-saver, and is the most powerful instrument in teaching a consciously accurate pronunciation. Though I feel this wise for French, I am not such a phonetic fanatic or fanatic phonetician as to advocate that system for Spanish *in toto* as obligatory. The Castilian language is almost phonetic, but even in teaching its pronunciation, the instructor should have a thorough knowledge of phonetic principles and of sound-physiology. This scientific equipment mated, of course, with a correct pronunciation, will enable him to explain to his students the various movements of the tongue, of the lips, and of other parts of the speech mechanism so as to provide the learner in a practical manner with definite instructions for conscious, precise imitation. A mere empiric practice should no longer be sufficient in teaching the pronunciation of any foreign language. An honest trial will, no doubt, convince a well-prepared, ambitious schoolmaster of the value of phonetic instruction.

II. VOCABULARY

That the word-stock of Spanish has very many cognates in French is, of course, not surprising as both tongues belong to the same group of languages, the Neo-Latin. Numerous illustrations could be given here. Just to cite a few of the *embarras de richesse*: . el jardín—le jardin, el pan—le pain, el pie—le pied; fácil

—facile; entre—entre; vender—vendre, comprender—comprendre; numerals, and pronouns.

The purpose of these remarks is, however, not so much to stress the lexicological aspect of the subject nor the historic-philological, but rather the idiomatic-stylistic side, as the latter is *the* criterion of close psycho-ethnic affinity. That not only great similarities exist but also many dissimilarities between Spanish and French is, of course, inevitable. We shall, however, touch solely upon the former to make our problem didactically positive, and thus actively to assist in the acquiring and in the assimilating of the new through the old. It is needless to add that a comparative study of either Spanish or French with, say, Classical Latin or with Italian as another representative type of Romance languages, will likewise reveal many points of contact. But ours is a concrete and very limited pedagogic task in correlation, and is an attempt at interpreting language as the expression of racial psyche. To be sure, comparisons should not be carried too far, for reasons of weight.

III. INFLECTION

Similar in Spanish and French are:

1. Declension of nouns.
2. Comparison of adjectives: más = plus.
3. Formation and comparison of adverbs: —mente = —ment.
4. Adjectival and pronominal forms of pronouns: el = le.
5. The formation of the periphrastic Future and Conditional is identical, and is both of historic and of psychological interest:

Fut. dar é (dar+he)	donner ai (donner+ai)
dar ás etc.	donner as etc.

Cond. dar ía	donner ais
dar ías etc.	donner ais etc.

Cf. vendí, vendió—je vends, il vendit; voy, vas, va—je vais, tu vas, il va, and other irregular verbal forms.

Important as these representative elementary illustrations of accidentance may be, yet more potent for our brief discussion in showing ethnic solidarity, are the next two items.

IV. IDIOMS

Compare:

<i>Spanish</i>	<i>French</i>
¿Qué quiere decir 'adiós'?	Que veut dire "adieu"?
Es decir. . .	C'est-à-dire. . .
¿Cómo se dice en inglés. . . ?	Comment (se dit) dit-on en anglais. . . ?
¿Qué significa 'por qué'?	Que signifie "pourquoi"?
Tenga Vd. la bondad de escribir.	Ayez la bonté d'écrire.
Sírvase Vd. abrir la puerta.	Veuillez ouvrir la porte.
Ne hay de qué.	Il n'y a pas de quoi.
¿Qué tiempo hace hoy?	Quel temps fait-il aujourd'hui?
Hace frío, etc.	Il fait froid, etc.
¿Qué hora es?	Quelle heure est-il?
¿A qué hora?	À quelle heure?
Hasta la vista.	Au revoir.
De mi parte.	De ma part.
De nuevo.	De nouveau.
A tiempo.	À temps.
Por ejemplo.	Par exemple.
Por consiguiente.	Par conséquent.
Acabo de dormir.	Je viens de dormir.
Hace un mes, etc.	Il y a un mois, etc.
Creo que sí (no).	Je crois que oui (non).
¿De qué color es. . . ?	De quelle couleur est. . . ?
¿Cómo se llama Vd.?	Comment vous appelez-vous?
Me llamo.	Je m'appelle.
¿Qué edad tiene Vd.?	Quel âge avez-vous?
Todo el mundo (cf. todas las semanas, etc.)	Tout le monde, (cf. toutes les semaines, etc.)
¿Sabe Vd. leer?	Savez-vous lire?
¿Conoce Vd. ese país?	Connaissez-vous ce pays?

Is this astounding congruence of these most common idiomatic expressions purely accidental? If not, what may be the real cause?—The two languages seem to reflect the influence of similar mental processes.

V. SYNTAX

(Arranged in arbitrary sequence though the most important points come last)

1. Observe the required use of *que* as relative pronoun and almost invariably as conjunction!

2. Compare the emotional, final, courteous ¿no es verdad? with: n'est-ce pas?

3. Note the use of a *preposition with the infinitive*:

Piense Vd. antes de hablar.

Pensez avant de parler.

Sin terminar su ejercicio.

Sans terminer son exercice.

4. Compare the *idiomatic prepositional usage* after certain verbs in:

Entrar en la sala de clase.

Entrer dans la salle de classe.

Salir de la biblioteca.

Sortir de la bibliothèque.

Asistir a la escuela.

Assister à l'école.

Pensar en su lección.

Penser à sa leçon.

Responder a una carta.

Répondre à une [carte] lettre.

Leer en un libro.

Lire dans un livre.

5. Contrast the employment of vigorous *negatives*:

Yo no trabajo jamás.

Je ne travaille jamais.

No tengo más que cinco céntimos.

Je n'ai que cinq centimes.

6. Compare the similarity of *conjunctions* after comparatives:

Él es más rico que Luisa.

Il est plus riche que Louise.

And

Tengo más (menos) de cuarenta pesetas.

J'ai plus (moins) de quarante francs.

7. Mark the *Genitive* usage as illustrating types of similar reflection:

Una lección de gramática.

Une leçon de grammaire.

La clase de francés.

La classe de français.

Los guantes de seda.

Les gants de soie.

Un millón de gente.

Un million de gens.

8. Note the lack or the use of the *definite article* in:

Hablar español.; en español.

Parler espagnol; en espagnol.

and

Estudiar, leer, etc. el inglés.

Étudier, lire, etc. l' anglais.

Luis Catorce.

Louis Quatorze.

(Cf. titles in direct and in indirect address).

Soy médico, etc.

Je suis médecin (indef. art.).

Tengo un papel en la mano, etc. J'ai un papier à la main, etc.

Viene los martes. Il vient les mardis.

Estar en la escuela o en la iglesia. Être à l'école ou à l'église.

9. Observe the employment of the *infinitive* after verbs:

a. Without preposition:

desear, deber, esperar, poder, saber.

désirer, devoir, espérer, pouvoir, savoir.

b. With preposition:

aprender a, apprendre à;

enseñar a, enseigner à.

c. As verbal noun:

El ver es el creer. Voir c'est croire.

10. Note the similarity as to the use of two personal pronominal objects in the first and second persons:

Él me lo da Il me les donne

nos los nous les

te la te la

os las vous les

11. The agreement of adjectives with their nouns and the adjective repetition is demanded in both languages alike. Yet the position of adjectives can be cited here to show the same attitude of mind in emphasizing the emotional-figurative meaning when they precede and the intellectual-literal connotation when the adjectives follow:

Un hombre pobre. Un homme pauvre (logical).

Un pobre hombre. Un pauvre homme (rhetoric).

12. The Future is frequently employed for the Present, and the Future Perfect for the Perfect, to denote individual probability or conjecture:

Pablo no ha escrito; estará malo. Paul n'a pas écrit; il sera malade.

13. Similarly, the Conditional is often used for the Imperfect, and the Conditional Perfect for the Pluperfect to express subjective probability:

El hombre habría estado enfermo. L'homme aurait été malade.

14. The use of the three past tenses can likewise be utilized to bring out the fact that the psychology or the subjectivity of the speaker is the decisive factor in both languages:

Juan leía cuando entré (he entrado) Jean lisait quand j'entrai (je
 en su cuarto. suis entré) dans sa chambre.

DEDUCTION

Even High School beginners in either Spanish or French can detect from the vocabulary above the close, external resemblance existing between the two languages. Yet the matter lies deeper and is not purely superficial: In things phonetic, climatic conditions and the temperament of the people necessarily influenced by climate, are vital factors. In matters idiomatic-stylistic, the attitude of mind, the world of thinking, of feeling, and of will is paramount. We find then in Spanish and French not only a similarity of mellow, vivacious utterance, but, above all, a striking kinship of ethnic psychology as reflected in the mode of expression, viz., in idiom and in syntax. Even first-year work can demonstrate that in a modest manner.

VI. DEVICE

In conclusion, and apart from the main thesis, the writer wishes to submit to his colleagues a scheme which he has practised for many years in modern language work; cf. p. 59. of his *The Direct Method in Modern Languages*, Scribners. It is applicable to every language *mutatis mutandis*. The following is the French "*sliding synopsis*" applied to Spanish. When all is said and done, verb drill is the *sine qua non* in our elementary instruction.

estudio el español	j'étudie l'espagnol
estudiabas "	tu étudiais "
estudió "	il étudia "
estudiaremos "	nous étudierons l'espagnol
estudiaríamos "	vous étudieriez "

han estudiado el español	ils ont étudié l'espagnol
había estudiado "	j'avais étudié "
hubiste estudiado "	tu eus étudié "
había estudiado "	il aura étudié "
habríamos estudiado "	nous aurions étudié "

Or:

hablas francés	he hablado francés
hablaba "	habías hablado francés

hablamos “	hubo hablado frances
hablaréis “	habremos hablado francés
hablarían “	habríaís hablado francés

Or:

escribe *su* carta, escribíamos *nuestras* cartas, etc.

(Both verbal and adjectival mutations take place).

It will be seen that by *sliding synopsis* is meant change of person for each of the ten tenses so far as possible. Having in both languages five simple and five compound tenses, we can always finish the circuit homogeneously. If we begin with the first person singular Present, we close with the first person plural Conditional Perfect. Commencing with the second person singular Present, we finish with the second person plural Conditional Perfect, etc. In fact, we may start with any person, number, or tense, not only affirmatively, but negatively and interrogatively, etc. We always conjugate in complete sentences.

So far, in our first-year work, we have studied but the Indicative (and Conditional) active of regular and of many irregular verbs. It can be seen, however, that this device is applicable to the Subjunctive and to the Passive as also to the Reflexive verbs.

We hope to have later on more material of a similar nature ready for Second-Year Spanish and French.

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